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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic study of mandated innovation in an urban school district analyzed teachers' emerging perspectives of curricular and concomitant administrative change. It responds to recent calls in educational research for studies that add to the understanding of the complicated processes in school worlds. Specifically, the study investigated teachers' perspectives with regard to the implementation of a special class called "Foreign Language Conversation and Culture," which accommodated those students who would probably have difficulty passing the regular "level one" foreign language class. It found that teachers believed that this particular innovation broadened students' understanding and tolerance of people from different cultures. However, teachers found that it was time consuming to create the materials for the new program and that they were made to feel like failures by administrators if they admitted difficulty in coping with the new situation. Third, student, teacher, and administrator school worlds were often at odds, thereby diminishing program effectiveness. The study concludes by indicating that innovation can only succeed in an environment conducive to change. (JAM)

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TEACHER PERSPECTIVES AND EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

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Introduction

Studies of educational change have typically been conducted from an administrative perspective, analyzing the implementation effort on the basis of measurable outcomes such as student achievement, staff development and support activities, or on the extent to which the innovation was adopted in classrooms and continued by teachers beyond the implementation stage. These criteria have been considered reasonable measures of the success of an innovation in the school program; however, judging an implementation effort solely on the basis of measurable outcomes has been deceptive and has led to such ill-conceived remedies as the "teacher-proof" curriculum.

The most prevalent cause of failure of school reform according to previous studies was the failure of teachers to implement an innovation in their classrooms, or, if they did implement it for a time, their failure to continue its use beyond the implementation stage during which they were given incentives such as monetary rewards or released time. Literature on the sociology of schools characterizes teachers as conservative (Waller, 1932; Eddy, 1969; Lortie, 1975) and literature on organizational change emphasizes the necessity for the change agent to overcome initial resistance to change (Bennis, 1961; Rogers, 1971; Gross, et al, 1971). The school administrators' world thus came to regard teachers as "resistant to change."

The incongruity between teachers' comments that administrators would not let them innovate and administrators' attitude that teachers are resistant to innovation was what led to this research on the teachers' view of a mandated innovation. This study is exploratory. Its purpose is to develop insight into how teachers decide to support

or resist an innovation. It addresses the questions: How to teachers view a change which they are told to make in their teaching? How do they define their task? What meaning do they attach to the order to make the change?

Methodology

Through participant observation at district, regional, and departmental meetings of foreign language teachers, the researcher examined how the individual teacher interprets his or her situation and decides on appropriate action. Formal observations and interviews were conducted at four senior high schools and two junior high schools. The object of this case study was a mandated innovation of policy in a large, predominantly black urban school district. The district policy, which began to be implemented in 1986, required that all students must complete one year of foreign language study to obtain a high school diploma. A special class called "Foreign Language Conversation and Culture" was created to accommodate those students who would probably have difficulty passing the regular "level one" foreign language class.

Conceptual Lenses

Individual teachers who work and live miles apart with little or no communication between them exhibited similar reactions to the new program. The teachers of the innovative course in this district have only two district-wide meetings per year which not all of them attend and at which their interaction with each other is minimal, and only one foreign language department meeting per month within their schools. Without any daily or even weekly communication, teachers who had seldom or never talked to each other evinced remarkably similar

views. This phenomenon can be understood as a function of their professional preparation and on-going participation in their chosen profession of foreign language teachers which forms an occupational social world. In this way, they are in the profession and the profession is in them, for "the structures of society become the structures of our own consciousness." (Berger, 1963, p. 121)

The concept of social worlds helps us understand how teachers of a given subject in the high school curriculum come to share a common outlook even though they may be scattered throughout the world, or as in this case, throughout a district. Social worlds are communities without a territorial base in which "the participants can understand each other, for they share a common symbolic environment." (Shibutani, 1986 p. 109) Just as participants in any "established occupation... tend to develop a common outlook" (Shibutani, 1986 p. 110), so do teachers of foreign languages in general and of each foreign language in particular.

What Is A Perspective?

A perspective is "a co-ordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation." (Becker, et. al. 1961) Before the new program was instituted foreign language study was an elective course; the foreign language high school class was thus composed of a self-selected group of students. This assured that each class was largely comprised of young people with interests and values similar to those of the teacher; consequently, the teacher could readily find approaches that interested and motivated students in the regular foreign language classes, with whom they had a sense of "shared identity." (Jackson, 1986) Teaching students who were not

self-selected into their classes thus presented a problematic situation for the teachers because their prior beliefs about teaching and learning were not effective with this different population of students.

"Perspectives differ from attitudes since they include actions and not merely dispositions to act," and "unlike values, perspectives are specific to situations and do not necessarily represent generalized beliefs or ideologies." (Tabachnick and Zeichner, 1985) Perspectives arise from social situations, which is another way of saying that they are a result of interaction of the individual or group with the social environment. Using a grounded theory approach, the following analysis of the implementation effort identifies some common perspectives among teachers as their professional world interacted with other school worlds. It then describes two new perspectives that emerged among foreign language teachers during their interaction with the new situation.

COMMON PERSPECTIVES

Teachers in the new program experienced a loss of control over their environment. They defined the task of teaching the new course as stressful and unrewarding. Many of them became cynical about their role as professionals.

Educational programs are typically planned on the basis of an underlying assumption that the students want to learn whatever it is the planners are offering and that the main task of planners and teachers is to present it in an understandable and interesting format. Teachers know that this assumption that students want to learn what

the school offers is only partially valid even in the best of circumstances. If we reflect on our own personal experiences in high school, our memories quickly inform us that there was always a tension between what we as students wanted to be doing and what teachers wanted us to do.

Foreign language teachers saw the situation in the Conversation and Culture classes as one in which the mixture of personalities of the students prevented teaching and learning from progressing at a normal pace. The researcher found a consensus among teachers that every class must be molded into a cohesive social unit before the learning enterprise can proceed. A mathematics teacher who was empathizing with a foreign language teacher over the new course during lunch commented that all teachers face the task of "getting the kids to do what you want them to do." The following orientation was suggested by a veteran foreign language teacher to a novice teacher of Foreign Language Conversation and Culture:

> I begin each new class by having them learn words in French about life. I put words such as "honor," "pride," and "self-respect" on the board. I start out my whole first week using nothing but those words. The kids are so insolent and testy and so outrageous. And I tell them that my first priority is unity. 'I don't care,' I say, 'I don't care if you learn a word of French' (but of course I do care if they learn French, you know). But I say, 'I don't care if you learn French. I do care about unity because before you can learn French you have to work together.' This is the only way they're going to have class be successful. This is my trip, the way I deal with it, is if they tell each other to be quiet. Then I can run the class. If I'm standing up here telling them to be quiet, they get attention from that and so they are noticing the attention and they don't hear anything.

Teachers facing a group of students who are in the class against their will, who see no useful purpose for the class, or who interact

with the teacher or with each other in negative ways find the task of creating a cohesive social world in the classroom particularly difficult. This teacher perspective was validated by comments and actions by people from other school worlds as well. For example, during a visit to one of the new classes, the Dean of Students in one school noted the undesirable composition of the class; he was acquainted with most of the students in the class through their frequent referrals to his office for bad behavior. His comment to the teacher that "this is a particularly bad mix" had an underlying implication of sympathy for the teacher having to control such an unruly group.

Foreign language teachers explained this "particularly bad mix" as the result of several factors, all of which reflect their loss of control over the environment: 1) counselors who use the new required class as a dumping ground for difficult students, 2) discipline procedures that prevent teachers from eliminating disruptive students from their classes in a timely manner, 3) teachers' powerlessness to change the curriculum or restructure the classes to address students' real needs.

The majority of teachers interviewed interpreted both the foreign language requirement for high school graduation and the requirement that they use a particular textbook for the class as self-serving moves of people in the district office. For example, regarding the foreign language requirement, one teacher said:

> I know this much, that "Baycity" district would like to come off as being academically inclined. So there is a state requirement that each student take either one year of art or one year of foreign language. And so "Baycity," instead of giving students the choice, decided for the students that they would take foreign language.

Becoming more academic was not perceived by the teachers as a serious intention on the part of the district but as only a facade. When asked, "So you think the goal of the district in instituting this program is to make the district more academically inclined?" the teacher hurried to say, "No, I think that's to make it appear that way to the public." In reference to tracking low-achieving students into "Foreign Language Conversation and Culture" instead of into the regular classes of foreign language, another teacher commented, "The Foreign Language Specialist is pushing this course because it's her program and she will get credit for developing it." These views reflect a pervasive attitude that the program was not instituted for the good of the students, the teachers, or even the district, but for the self-interest of individuals "downtown." Thus, teachers of the new foreign language class became cynical about the motivation and sincerity of the district bureaucracy in instituting the new program. What this innovation meant for the teachers was that a self-interested, overly bureaucratic administration had put them in a new program without adequate preparation or organizational support. In spite of the fact that trying to make the program work was extremely stressful and seemingly unproductive, they felt they must put up with adverse conditions because of the anticipated future benefits to them as a group, to individual students, and to the society.

Trying to make the program work was so stressful that teachers sometimes felt compelled to do things that were contrary to their best judgement in order to "keep some sanity" and survive. They gave in to pressure from counselors, for example, to keep a certain student in the class, or to pressure from students to give them "busy work"

instead of giving them challenging exercises. Teachers said they got "worn down" by all the demands on their energy and "too tired" to fight for what was best in their judgement.

TWO EMERGENT PERSPECTIVES

Two new perspectives on the course emerged among foreign language teachers as a result of interactions between them and other social worlds: the perspective of "being held hostage" and the perspective of "cynical faith survival."

Properties of the perspective of being held hostage are: 1) an interaction between the lack of materials and lack of time; 2) administrative exploitation of teachers' values, in particular their professional norms, their idealistic values, and their desire to teach intellectually stimulating courses; 3) frustration of teachers' efforts to exercise their professional judgement; 4) thwarting teachers' pursuit of their values; 5) normative expectation of teachers' self-sacrifice of time and money; 6) restraint on the teacher's responsiveness to interests and needs of students; and 7) strategies for escape from this feeling of being held hostage.

The second new perspective that emerged from this problematic situation was one of the strategies for coping with this uncomfortable feeling of being a prisoner. This perspective contains a mixture of cynicism and faith and helps teachers to survive emotionally, so I have called it cynical faith survival.

Properties of Being Held Hostage

The content of this perspective is that teachers feel locked in to their teaching assignments by their desire to make the program work

and/or by their desire for job security. This gives rise to a sense of being held hostage in situations where they have little or no control over the factors that they judge necessary for adapting the program to the students. They feel that they have to tolerate these adverse conditions in order to maintain their jobs and the program. They make do within the boundaries of the givens while they test those boundaries. Foreign language teachers' efforts to adapt the program to their classes were blocked by constraints of time available to them and by bureaucratic regulations in choice of materials and textbook, teaching schedule, content, date of entry of new students, and discipline. These properties, or conditions under which the perspective arose, are detailed below.

Properties 1 and 2:

1) Interaction of Lack of Materials and Time

2) Administrative Exploitation of Teachers' Values

The problem of inappropriate materials and textbook interacts with and is exacerbated by the problem of the teachers' overloaded time schedule.

In a typical instance of exploitation of teachers' values, the high value placed by a teacher on teaching an intellectually stimulating class was exploited by the school site administration. For the "privilege" of teaching an advanced placement foreign language class, this teacher had to accept a schedule which required five preparations, although the legal limit according to contract is three. The advanced class which she had requested was a combination of French 3 and French 4, requiring two intellectually challenging preparations for that class period. Her other classes consisted of German 1,

German 2, and two classes of French Conversation and Culture. She is an activist who supported the program from the beginning. She was so enthusiastic about the positive tone of the district meeting for Conversation and Culture teachers that she indicated in her interview that she would now choose to have a class of C&C in her schedule if certain improvements were made. Otherwise she would not choose to teach it and would probably resign from her position if her schedule did not improve. Her response to the question whether she would choose to teach it if she had the choice reveals how the teachers' lack of time interacts with the need for adapted materials:

> Yesterday the district meeting of C&C teachers was so positive, that I [pauses, then says hesitantly]... I would teach one course of C&C. Two courses is really too much. Because it takes more planning than any other course. Everything has to be planned out exactly for them. The materials are not available and geared to their level, so you have to rewrite the material. You have to rewrite everything, which requires a tremendous amount of time and you have other courses to teach also.

3) Frustration of Efforts To Exercise Professional Judgement

Teachers are held hostage by the other social worlds which have their own professional values and are meeting their own needs for order and job security. The counselors, the principals, and the curriculum specialist have frustrated teachers' efforts to exercise their professional judgement by pressuring them to 1) admit new students throughout the school year, 2) let disruptive students back into their classes, and 3) use the textbook designated for the course.

Counselors were still sending new students into the Foreign Language Conversation and Culture classes in December after three and one half months of the semester had gone by. Counselors ignored teachers' telling them that they would absolutely refuse any new

students into their classes after a certain date. The foreign language teachers tried first to explain to counselors that students could not benefit from coming in after the first month of instruction. When this pressure on counselors to conform to the professional judgement of teachers did not work, the next step was to let it be known that Mrs. X or Mr. Y would categorically refuse any new student and would send all such new enrollees back to the counselor. At this point, the issue became a conflict of wills between the counselors and the teachers. This interaction is revealed in the following account from a December interview:

> I tell them it's too late to assign a student, especially in a foreign language class, because you have to at least develop the basic sounds. I cannot go over the basic sounds every day after the third and fourth week. We have established a policy in our department not to accept students. But I'm still being assigned students anyway and sometimes a counselor sends the same student down three times during one period to get him signed into my class.

The teachers are then under pressure from the counselors to accept new enrollees because "the argument is that they don't have any other class to go to. That was the direct response the counselor gave to my objections." Mr. "Dupont" was still getting new students in December and all of them were discipline problems, disrupting the class and the teacher's peace of mind: "Two weeks ago was the last student I got that didn't have any French at all. And is a discipline problem although I try to work with him."

Teachers find that the question of who gets assigned to a class can affect the whole make-up of the class, especially those assigned late in the semester. Mr. "Dupont" observed that:

> They are usually "from other schools where they have had a discipline problem and they have been assigned to this class. And all of these students have been discipline

problems, have not been able to catch up and have just created additional work for me - negative work - not constructive work where I could design a good lesson plan. And I strongly feel it was unfair to other students and to me to assign students like that.

Teachers' efforts to exercise their professional judgement are also thwarted by having disruptive students sent back into their classes after they have been sent to the office. They feel they must put up with rude and disruptive students to follow the district procedures for discipline. The disrespectful behavior of these students towards learning and towards the teacher disturbs the balance of the classroom world, which causes the teacher to be less effective because of stress and the students to be less engaged in learning. All teachers expressed dissatisfaction with discipline in the district. One teacher, for example, said that the improvement she would most like to see in the district is that "the discipline should be reinforced" -

> If I send a student out on a referral, I would like to have better follow up. I mean, more consequences. If a student swears at a teacher, I do expect the student to be suspended. If you are disrespectful to a teacher in such a way that you are swearing, abusing the teacher verbally, that student should be suspended for at least one or two days.
> And that does not happen. No. The district policy says it has to be <u>habitual</u> profanity. And it has been interpreted that it means a teacher has to be sweared at several times for the student to be suspended. And I disagree with that totally.

Teachers are concerned with more than just the verbal abuse and stress that they suffer in a case like the above, they are also concerned that it affects the climate in the classroom:

> If one student is disrespectful and gets away with it all the others think, 'well, we can do it, too.' Unless they have a different kind of upbringing. And in these classes I find that if one does it then the others tend to follow.

> They look at it this way: 'he got away with it, I will get away with it, too.'

When asked, "Do you have students in your class now who have been referred and who have simply been sent back?" this same teacher said emphatically, "Many! Many students to whom I have given referrals on profanity, and then they come back. Even without any punishment."

Another teacher, discussing students who had been behavior problems and were still in class causing disruption in spite of having been referred to counselors, said -

> It's frustrating. If I could pick, I could probably have an ideal class if I could just go in and say, "I want this one, this one, and this one - out!" But you can't do that. And in the meantime you have to try to make the class function in spite of the negative chemistry. I have kids in there now who have already been referred several times. The counselors are working with referrals not only from me apparently; they tell me "you're not the only teacher" but they don't have any place to put those students. That's one of the problems.

Foreign language teachers find that they can no longer get disruptive students out of the Conversation and Culture class as easily and quickly as they could from the regular language classes:

> It used to be that if I wanted to remove a student and there was room in another class, that's where they would go, which unfortunately would become the dumping class... I guess that's what C&C is now. I find that I'm getting some of these kids now who other people just don't want. So that they're still coming in.

They wonder how many days of disruption they have to put up with and how much extra wasted time they must spend on calling parents and documenting the student's misconduct before the teacher and the rest of the students in that class period can continue the learning enterprise in peace:

> This class is probably one of the worst I've had in terms of discipline and disruptive behavior and even counselors were saying, "Well, if that student gets one more referral, from

anybody, they're on their way out." And you keep hearing this, and you wonder, "how many more do I need to write?" You know, how much documentation do you need? With these kind of things happening.

Properties 4 and 5:

4) Teachers thwarted in pursuit of their values;
5) Normative expectation of teachers' self-sacrifice in personal time and money.

Teachers were frustrated in their attempts to use a different textbook than the one supplied. The specialist visited classes and instructed teachers and principals that they must use the assigned book. Teachers' objections to the designated books are linked to their professional judgement in pacing the presentations and to two of their basic values: 1) promoting pluralistic equity in America and 2) inculcating global views of culture in their students as opposed to ethnocentric narrowness. One teacher, for example, found the basic Spanish book "totally inappropriate" because in his professional judgement regarding the technical aspects of the book "it goes too fast for even the Spanish 1 class. It's far too complicated for Spanish 1; grammatically and in amount of material, it's wrong." His egalitarian values were also offended by the cultural material:

> In terms of the cultural background, I find it offensive. It has little readings about 'Michella' the maid, how what she does isn't really very hard, and how she is happy that she has such easy work. I found it very offensive.

This teacher was also indignant about the lack of global perspective in the book - it has such a narrow focus on Mexico that there isn't even a map of South America in it. He remembers arguing about this point at a district meeting, where he demanded that the district at least supply maps of South America to the teachers. He was disappointed to discover that instead of finding support from

colleagues he found an expectation that teachers use their own resources to supplement classroom supplies:

> I remember this argument very clearly. The textbook has a map of Spain, a map of Mexico, and a map of the Caribbean and Central America. It does not have a map of South America, and that was not supplied to the teacher. We had this fight about that because I insisted that you could not put 'knowing the geography of Latin America' in the Standards of Achievement and then not supply the teacher with accurate maps for the class. And I was told by another teacher on the committee that she had always gone to Guy's [teacher supply store] after school [and bought maps for her classes], and so she didn't see why anyone needed to be supplied with the actual materials. I think I have her undying enmity for saying that's why this is the worst school district in the nation. It's that attitude that does it. You cannot expect teachers to do a decent job under these conditions. This is on top of the textbook being so awful in the first place. That's the grammar book.

Property 6:

6) Restraint on teachers' response to interests and needs of students.

The supplementary paperback culture book does not make up for the shortcomings of the basic text. The culture book has the narrow focus of a tourist in Spain, which teachers find is inappropriate and uninteresting to their students:

> Our culture book is called In Spain and it's to be used for people who are about to travel to Spain. There are activities they can do when they get back from Spain. None of these students are ever going to get to Spain. Possibly, they will get to Mexico. Maybe they will get to the Mission District in San Francisco, if anyplace! And yet there are so many ways that you could do a culture book about what really is out there. Books about the history of the Caribbean, books about the history of Mexico, or Mexican Americans, or... It's just so...! [Sounding frustrated and incredulous, he can't find words] It's totally focussed on traveling in Spain!

Property 7:

7) Strategies for coping.

The perspective of being held hostage contains a continuous search for means to escape the unreasonable constraints, and more particularly, the feeling of being a prisoner. One way people can escape from normative expectations is to stop believing in the things they are expected to believe in and take on a cynical attitude. This is one of the processes Foreign Language Conversation and Culture teachers resorted to for coping with the uncomfortable feeling of being held hostage.

Teachers who survived and persisted in supporting the program either called upon their idealism to sustain them or combined their idealism with cynicism in a cynical faith survival perspective. Others who survived in the program but did not persist in supporting it became merely cynical. They carried out their duties in a ritualistic manner, but did not believe that their efforts made any difference.

Teachers who did not feel they could survive in the situation with any amount of "sanity" managed to rearrange their schedules or left the department, the school, the district, or the profession.

DISCUSSION

> In [Verstehen], each social situation is sustained by the fabric of meanings that are brought into it by the several participants. It is clear, of course, that in a situation whose meaning is strongly established by tradition and common consent a single individual cannot accomplish very much by proffering a deviant definition. At the very least, however, he can bring about his alienation from the situation. (Berger, 1963, p. 126)

Teachers who stayed in the innovative program organized their behavior in response to the situational constraints by becoming cynical and diverting their energies from teaching the curriculum as it had been conceived into teaching the class in whatever way was possible. As the feeling of being held hostage developed and increased, the level and direction of teachers' effort shifted. Much of their energy was diverted from improving instruction to remaking the social environment, "politicking" as one teacher said, and to coping with their own need to maintain balance in their lives. Maintaining equilibrium, or surviving, is a basic process in all human life and can be expected to take precedence over other concerns in problematic situations. Given the stress and loss of professional status that this innovation engendered, it is not surprising that teachers decided to withdraw their support.

In this paper on teacher perspectives the author has explicated some of the complicated processes of an attempted school change in the hope that this understanding will improve our "prescriptions for remedies." In this innovative program teacher support and continuance of the innovation depended on the teachers' definition of the situation and on the perspectives that emerged as a result of the change. Their definition of the situation could be traced to values

of their professional formation combined with their interactions with other school worlds.

Implications

The implementation effort did not take into account the impact on the innovative program of values from the teachers' world and of their interactions with other school worlds . The teachers interpreted the administrative perspective as exploitive because it "used" them to accomplish administrative goals rather than taking into consideration 1) the context in which teachers worked and 2) teachers' rationale for their ideas and actions. This led to either cynicism or active hostility to the new program on the part of the teachers.

The interviews conducted during this research revealed three main factors that influence teachers' perspectives of an innovation: First, values inherent in the innovation - Do the teachers find them congruent with the values of their world view or are they contradictory? Foreign language teachers unanimously agreed with the values inherent in this innovation. In spite of the fact that the curriculum goals were not stated in the syllabus, the teachers had their own very clear ideas of why all students should study foreign language. Their goals for all students included broadened horizons and understanding and tolerance of people with different ways of thinking and being. Because of this strongly held value, they supported the new curriculum at first in spite of severe stress and inconveniences.

Second, values of professional ethics - Does the innovation provide the teacher with options to exercise his or her professional judgement? The teachers of the new curriculum were prevented from

replacing the textbook and found the time involved in creating new, more appropriate materials prohibitive. They were not allowed to remove problem students from the classes even when they were disruptive enough to prevent other students from learning. The class was perceived as a "dumping ground" by administrators as well as by teachers and students. Rather than recognizing that an extra burden was being placed on these teachers, the administrative staff, especially the counselors, expected them to deal with these classes as they would any other class. As a result, teachers were made to feel like failures if they admitted difficulty in coping with the new situation. While teachers continued to support the new program in principle, they were frustrated by not being allowed to exercise their professional judgement in taking steps necessary for its success.

Third, evolving perspectives formed by interactions with other social worlds - Do these interactions enhance the innovation or defeat it? The student world resisted the new curriculum - each day became a struggle for the teachers. The administrative world either could not or would not make exceptions for the special cases that this new course engendered. These interactions diminished teachers' initial support of the innovation because they were not free to create an environment that could make this curriculum successful.

Cynical faith survival was a solution to the problematic situation for the teachers, but not a desireable outcome from the standpoint of the implementors. Viewing human conduct as an adjustment to one's immediate situation implies that people's behavior can be changed "by altering the circumstances and situations people have to contend with." (Becker et al., 1961, p. 442) Planners and

implementors of school reform must pay more heed to the circumstances at the classroom level and, more particularly, the processes that are set in motion by an innovation. Teacher educators must make teachers more aware of their ability to create the social environment. "If teacher educators are to make a difference, they need to conceive of ways in which persons can be urged to assert themselves, to take their own initiative, to overcome their alienation." (Greene, 1978) Rather than planning "teacher-proof" curricula we need to plan innovative programs whose processes emphasize the teachers' creation of a classroom and school environment.

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